Castlemaine Naturalist

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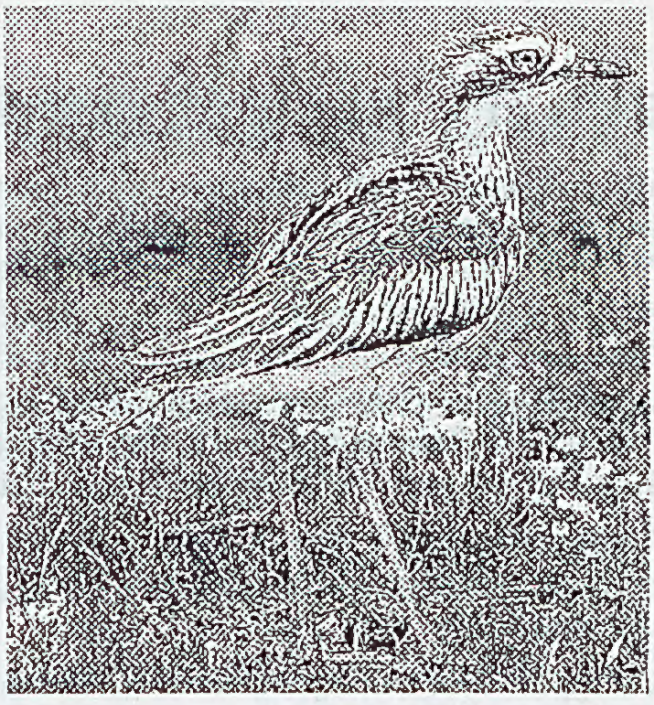

Bush Stone-Curlew (from BOCA)

A Pallid Cuckoo Experiment

One morning in late September I could hear a Pallid Cuckoo plaintively calling. I set out with my binoculars across the neighbouring paddock towards the tree from whence the call was coming. As I drew near the bird flew out of that tree to another an equal distance on the other side of me and called again. I have a habit of imitating a bird call when I hear one and this I did now; this had the effect of making the bird fly directly over me to another distant but closer tree. I repeated the call; immediately the bird flew over me. I kept repeating the call all the time moving back to my garden and the bird came closer and closer and eventually landed in one of my eucalypts. I had a good look at it and thanked it for coming into my garden.

When I went inside I consulted the Slater *Field Guide to Australian Birds* about the Pallid Cuckoo and learned that this bird was a male because of its call - "loud whistle, ascending scale". The book described the female call as "hoarse ascending wh-wh weeya wh-wh weeya". Obviously the bird thought I was a competitor in his territory! I wondered what would happen if I imitated the female call. I went outside and listened; I could hear him nearby. I gave the female call. The effect was immediate; he flew over the garden. One more call and he was back in the same eucalypt. I apologised for deceiving him and he acknowledged by leaving a deposit!

Brenda Envall

Friends of the Bush Stone-curlew has been formed by the Bird Observers Club of Australia. Aims include protection of Bush Stone-curlew woodland habitat by encouraging landowners to control grazing and clearance of fallen branches and logs, and control of predators such as cats, dogs and foxes. Friends will also collect records of sightings. Would you like to be part of this friends group? If so, contact George Broadway, or the Bird Observers Club of Australia, PO Box 185 Nunawading Vic..

Birds at 61 Hunter St, October 1997

A Grey Shrike-thrush foraging in the garden, and the male Blackbird also contribute to the entertainment. I have heard but not seen, a Horsfield Bronze-cuckoo. Striated Pardalotes have moved into the next box, and the Crimson Rosellas are also in residence - undisputed this season in contrast to the many fierce and noisy battles with a pair of Eastern Rosellas last year.

A pair of goldfinches visit the bird bath daily, and also feed on the seedheads of dandelions scattered around the "lawn". Another regular visitor to the bird bath is a Grey Fantail, as are New Holland Honeyeaters - noisily scolding the Sparrow hordes.

The Blue Mallet eucalypt and grevilleas are attracting Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills also, but strangely enough, the usual wattlebird family is missing at present

A Magpie hunts the tiny skinks which live in the thick ground-cover adjacent to the back door. As a result, a large number of very young ones are minus their tails!

S Parnaby

Babblings From Barkers Creek. No 5

Nestings At Barkers Creek. About five weeks ago, on a Sunday, we were visited by four wood ducks, much to the annoyance of our magpies. They continued to visit us over the next week with the ducks trying to squeeze their way into the small parrot nesting boxes, like overweight dancers trying to pull on some one else's too tight tutu, all to no avail. After several days of frustration they each settled into a duck box. Every morning, at about 6.30, the ducks would struggle out of the their box to fly off but return about an hour later with their respective drake. After about three to four weeks we awoke to see these tiny little black objects climb out of one the boxes, stand on the platform, then float to the ground like dark snow flakes. They all very quickly gather around their mother and trooped off after her. The other duck produced her clutch unobserved by as. We are very proud "grand parents" of twenty three wood duck "grand children".

Each year we have been at Barkers Creek we seem to have more and more birds nesting. To date, magpies, choughs, ducks, crimson rosellas and currawongs have all nested and fledged their young. We are sure, from the activity around us, that the honey eaters and wrens have also nested somewhere.

Excitement at Barkers Creek. Now armed with a tractor and carryall, we have commenced to collect and remove rubbish which had been dumped by previous owners over a number of years. One pile of rubbish was made up of used sheets of galvanised iron. Each sheet was removed with care as it seemed an ideal habitat for brown snakes. As I removed the second last sheet an extremely large brown snake rushed forward very aggressively, and as the distance between us narrowed rapidly my heart beat responded in kind. At the last moment the snake stopped and slide back in a beautiful winding motion while eyeing me with a very clear intention should I choose to follow him. I left him to his retreat. However, having to complete the task I returned some days later and recommenced the process, with even more care. Again as I lifted the second last sheet my heart beat accelerated. No action. Then the last sheet. As I

started to raise the sheet, again there was a flurry of scales and pointed nose appeared. With quick flick the sheet dropped away, this time to reveal a small goanna, who rustled off as startled as myself.

Wildflowers at Barkers Creek. Our rainfall figures are showing that the rainfall to date is very similar to that in 1994. The wildflowers started to appear almost two months later than last year. However, after this late showing the numbers have continued to increase. We had hundreds of Wax-lip Orchids which always tend to lead off the annual parade. And since their appearance the sixty other varieties which we have on our block have had their week of supremacy before fading to let yet another variety take dominance. Currently, there are 100's of Chocolate Lilies.

We recently had a week at Hall's Gap and there the wildflowers were in full bloom. We were tempted to call them "wild bushes" as they were so large. For those who have not been there in October, plan a trip.

John

Thursday Evening Excursions

These plants were seen in flower on the Spring evening walks

- p Oct 9th, Poverty Gully Track;
- m Oct 16th, beside Maldon/Castlemaine Rail line, Winters Flat.
- g Oct 23rd, Walmer Gravel reserve.

Acacia acinacea, Gold-dust Wattle (pmw); *A. aspera*, Rough Wattle. (pmw); *A. paradoxa*, Hedge Wattle (m); *Arthropodium strictum*, Chocolate Lily (pmw); *Bracteantha viscosa*, Sticky Everlasting (pm); *Brachyloma daphnoides*, Daphne Heath (mw); *Burchardia umbellata*, Milkmaids (mw); *Caledenia carnea*, Pink Fingers (pmw); *C. cucullata*, Hooded Caledenia (mw); *C. gracilis*, Musk Caledenia (w); *C. tentaculata*, Greencomb Spider-orchid (p); *Calochilus robertsonii*, Purplish Beard-orchid (pw); *Cassinia arcuata*, Coffee Bush (pm); *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, Common Everlasting (m); *C. semipapposum*, Clustered Everlasting; *Craspedia glauca*, Billy Buttons (pmw); *Daviesia leptophylla*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea (pm); *D. ulicifolia*, Gorse Bitter-pea (pm); *Dianella revoluta*, Black-anther Flax-lily (m); *Diuris pardina*, Leopard Orchid (p); *Drosera peltata* ssp *auriculata*, Tall Sundew (pw); *Eriostemon verrucosus*, Fairy Waxflower (pmw); *Exocarpos cupressiformis*, Cherry Ballart (m); **Genista monspessulana*, Cape Broom (m); *Glossodia major*, Wax-lip orchid (pmw); *Goodenia blackiana*, Primrose Goodenia (pm); *Hakea decurrens*, Silky Hakea (mw); *Hibbertia exutiaces*, Tangled Guinea-flower (mw); *H. sericea*, Silky Guinea-flower (w); *Hardenbergia violacea*, Purple Coral-pea (pmw); *Leucopogon virgatus*, Common Beard-heath (w); *Microceris scapigera*, Yam Daisy (pm); *Pterostylis plumosa*, Bearded Greenhood (p); *P. nutans*, Nodding Greenhood (m); *Pimelea linifolia*, Slender Riceflower (pmw); *Ozothammus obordatus*, Grey Everlasting (pmw); *Rhytidospermum procumbens*, White Marianth (pm); *Stackhousia monogyna*, Creamy Candles (pmw); *Tetratheca ciliata*, Pink Bells (pmw); *Thelymitra antennifera*, Rabbits ears (w); *T. megcalyptera*, Scented Sun-orchid (w); *T. pauciflora*, Slender Sun-orchid (w); *T. rubra*, Salmon Sun-orchid (w); *Thysanotus patersonii*, Twining Fringe-lily (pw); *Wurmbea dioica*, Early Nancy (pm).

At Walmer *Bursaria spinosa*, Sweet Bursaria; *Dianella revoluta*, Black-anther Flax-lily;

Microceris scapigera, Yam Daisy; *Brunonia australis* (Blue Pincushion, which were well in bud) and *Acrotriche serrulata*, Honey Pots were also seen, but were not in flower.

Penny Garnett, and others.

Mallacoota Inlet

On a recent visit to Mallacoota in East Gippsland it was interesting to discover that in 1909 following deputations by Field Naturalists to the then Minister of Lands, a large area around the inlet (11,400 acres or 4,560 hA) was "temporarily" reserved as National Park. In 1956 it came under the National Parks Act, and in 1979 was included in a much larger Croajingalong National park of 86,000 hA. Today it is possible to see the result of almost 90 years of natural evolution of the bush without undue interference, and very impressive it is! Many plants common in the coastal vegetation of N.S.W. have their most southerly occurrence in the eastern corner of Victoria. Several of them occur no further south than Mallacoota, where they are able to survive because of the mild climate.

Walking tracks are many and varied, and the vegetation types range from rain forest to low heathlands along the coast. Wildflowers and birds are prolific. It was very encouraging to see that in the ten years since we last explored te area intensively there has been no visible deterioration in the environment- due in no small part to a small and dedicated group, the "Friends of Mallacoota".

During our stay we spent a day cruising the extensive lower lake and visited the site of the original village at Cemetery Bight on the eastern side of the inlet. En route we had to navigate a very shallow area known as the Goodwin Sands - roughly 2 km by 1 km in extent, and covered with large numbers of water birds - mainly pelicans and swans. We were told that in the moulting season Black Swans from the entire eastern region congregate here, where the shallow water makes for an easy life during the moult. Our guide assured us that six thousand swans had been estimated on one count - I could well believe it.

We reduced speed as we skirted the shallows so that we did not disturb the birds, and indeed on this occasion the water was dotted with Black Swans as far as the eye could see (with the assistance of binoculars).

On shore in the quieter spot it is necessary to be alert - reptiles do not hibernate in this mild climate, and occasionally you will find a Red-bellied Black Snake or Tiger Snake soaking up the sun. Diamond Pythons are also found in this part of the world, and a huge Lace Monitor came to visit us in search of scraps, as we ate our lunch at a picnic area near one of the jetties.

S Parnaby

A Wildflower Walk in Harcourt

On 19 Oct the Harcourt Tourist & Heritage Association organised a Wildflower Walk. 10 enthusiastic locals led by Wendy Barron visited a patch of bush close to the old Harcourt tip along Peelers Road and also the Wildflower Reserve behind the Leisure Centre. We spent about an hour at each location. Some had books & the CFNCs pamphlet and with the aid of these and peoples' knowledge we were able to identify

most of the flowers we found. Below is a list of those we could identify

Found in both locations
Grey Everlasting
Rice Flower
Hooded Caladenia
Wax Flower
Twining Fringe-lily
Waxlip Orchid
Tetratheca
Pink Fingers
Yam Daisy
Chocolate Lily
Candles
Gold-dust Wattle
Daphne Heath
Leopard Orchid
Tiger Orchid
Unidentified pea bush

Found along Peelers Road
Bearded orchid
Honeydew
White Marianth
Mat Rush
Bearded Greenhood

Found at Wildflower Reserve
Milkmaids
Everlasting daisy
Spider orchid
Billy Buttons
Grevillea alpina
Tangled Guinea-flower (*Hibbertia)*
Blue-spotted sun-orchid
Matted Bush-pea
Flax-lily
Calytrix tetragona
Sarsaparilla
Hedge Wattle
Unidentified pea plant (with long, thin leaves)

A plant in Peelers Road had small salmon-pink flowers with four petals, on a long spike.

Brenda Envall

Plants Flowering in Turnbull Property

A list of plants in flower, seen on the evening excursion of 2 October to the Turnbull property in Specimen Gully Road.

Acacia acinacea, Gold-dust Wattle
A. dealbata, Silver Wattle
A. pycnantha, Golden Wattle
Arthropodium strictum, Chocolate Lily
Bracteantha viscosa, Sticky Everlasting
Burchardia umbellata, Milkmaids
Caladenia carnea sp agg, Pink Fingers
Cassinia arcuata, Chinese Scrub
Craspeadia glauca, Billy Buttons
Daviesia ulicifolia, Gorse Bitter-pea
Diuris pardina, Leopard Orchid
Drosera pelata ssp auriculata, Tall Sundew
Eriostemon verrucosus, Fairy Wax-flower
Goodenia blackiana, Primrose Goodenia
Hakea decurrens ssp *physocarpa,* Hakea
Hibbertia exutiaces, Tangled Guineaflower
Glossodia major, Waxlip Orchid
Luzula meridionalis, Field Woodruff
Microseris scapigera, Yam Daisy
Ozothamnus obcordatus, Grey Everlasting
Rhytidosporum procumbens, Marianth
Tetratheca ciliata, Pink Bells
Wurmbea dioica, Early Nancy

Coleraine Arboretum

If you're in the Hamilton area or driving south from the Grampians or north from Portland. and who isn't!; then a visit to the "Peter Francis" Points Reserve outside Coleraine is a must.

It's the second biggest collection of Eucalypts in the world or it was when Tom Garnett wrote about it some years ago. In 1966 the land was a disused quarry on a hillside bare of trees except for a single she-oak. Now it contains the most varied collection cif trees and shrubs you could expect to find in temperate Australia. In fact 37 hectares of them comprising 12,000 plants of 2,000 species and 500 different species of Eucalypts. The Eucalypts come from habitats as different as central Australia to alpine forests.

It all started in 1968 when Peter Francis, a local man in retirement due to ill-health with a love for Australian trees saw the possibility of planting up the bare slopes of the Points with Australian flora on a generous scale. Helped and encouraged by others, but mainly doing the work himself it began to take shape as he planted and planted. Today you would think the forest and understory of acacias, grevilleas, banksias, hakeas, callistemons, melaleucas, kunzeas and so much more had been there for ever. Yes, adequate labelling is still a shortcoming now as it was in 1990 to help us identify the range of plants but in all other respects and as a refuge for birds it is a magic place and demonstrates what can be done by local initiative.

Chris Morris

Observations

Birds chase the dog. A neighbour has a Jack Russel Terrier which likes chasing birds, but the Wattlebirds have turned the tables and begun chasing the dog. The neighbour also watched Noisy Miners attacking a red plastic ball repeatedly. They didn't stop until the ball was removed. (M Willis)

Reed Warblers are back in the reeds along Forest Creek, both at the Wheelers St. and Barkers St bridges. (L Perkins and G Broadway)

Little Grass Bird, has been seen near the lake at Little Hampton. (S Bruton)

Bird observations at Symes Rd, Harcourt. Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Reed Warblers, Rufous Whistlers, and Pallid, Fantail and Horsfields Bronze Cuckoos are all nearby, and a Swamp Harrier was seen on three occasions hunting near the railway bridge that crosses the creek. (D Turner)

Black Kite at Eddington was reported by Chris Morris.

First European wasp of season was seen on 23 October. (G Broadway)

Straw-necked Ibis at Ravenswood. A huge flock was observed. (B Envall).

Indian Mynahs at Castlemaine North. Indian Mynahs again trying to take over the Galahs' nest, but I've so far managed to frighten them away. (R Mills)

Birds and cats. A Red Wattlebird has taken to attacking one of the cats quite ferociously, but as a lazy old non-birder anyway it seems a bit over the top, but the young cat was stalking Mum Magpie recently. She just called the troops which arrived in a few moments, all three attacking a very bewildered and chastened cat. When M.M. saw the battle was over she just went back to searching for grubs and the cat slunk off with its head over its shoulder watching that she didn't tackle him. He's sworn off Magpies, and only has to hear the warning call when he's out of his cage to make himself scarce. (R Mills)

Nankeen Night Herons at Donald. A flock of more than 50 Nankeen Night Herons was roosting at the Apex Picnic Ground at Donald on the weekend of 18-19 Oct. On being disturbed, most took to the air, and made an unforgettable sight as they wheeled overhead. Both adults and juveniles were in the flock. (E Perkins)

Sacred Kingfisher in Botanic Gardens. A Sacred Kingfisher was a regular visitor at the botanic gardens a few weeks ago. It has not been seen recently.

Anchor Plant at Joyce's Creek. An Anchor Plant (*Discaria pubescens)* has been reported from the vicinity of Joyces Creek, at Plaistowe. Anchor Plant is an endangered plant, and is often to be found on the basalt along streamsides.

From the Committee (and elsewhere)

WVFNCA to close. At the annual meeting of the Western Victoria Field Naturalists Clubs Association held at Donald on 18 October, it was decided to disband the association from March 1998. The Association has been in operation since the early 1960s, and has been an important body in both conservation and the fostering co-operation between clubs. A major activity was publication of the A.C. Beauglehole plant lists, which covered all areas of Victoria. The Association has considerable funds. This money will be used to set up the Western Victoria Conservation Fund, to be held by the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association. This interest from this fund will be available for conservation projects in Western Victoria. After the closure of WVFNCA there will be one association, the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association.

Field Naturalists Clubs get-together at Castlemaine. The Castlemaine Club proposes to hold an informal get-together weekend on the weekend 12-13 September, 1998 for VFNCA clubs. The event would start with our regular meeting on 11 Sept. On Saturday and Sunday morning we would hold excursions, and have some program (possibly speaker) on Saturday evening. We could consider a bus trip on Saturday, and a barbecue lunch on Sunday.

Cape Broom Pull. Over the years, many thousand Cape Broom and Flax-leaf Broom have been pulled from the Botanic Gardens. The plants have been hand-pulled, so that there has been minimum ground disturbance, and the new growth is mostly of native species. There was an enormous seed-bank left by the broom, and we have pulled up thousand of seedlings. In the areas first cleared of broom, there are now very few seedlings coming up, so future seedling-pulls will be much easier. Your help would be appreciated. Walk over the good areas, and pull any broom that is in flower. Do not use a mattock or other digging device. A CFNC committee is seeking funds to remove broom from those areas not yet tackled. DCNRE has booked a team of volunteers trom Trust for Conservation Volunteers to pull broom during May 1998. So we may be well on the way to eradication of broom from the gardens.

Thursday Evening outings. These were judged as very successful by those who attended. Thanks are due to the leaders of the outings.

Marc Cohn Nature Collection. The natural history book collection of the late Mark Cohn was launched at the Bendigo Library on 28 October. The book collection is housed upstairs in the library, and is available for research. Mr Cohn was foundation president of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club.

C.F.N.C. Program

Fri 14 Nov. "In the steps of Baron Von Mueller - The North Australian Exploring Expedition", Marco Duretto, speaker. UCA hall at 8.00 pm. The committee is making arrangements for a representative of *Save the Barfold Gorge* committee to speak briefly at this meeting. Should we make a financial contribution to their work?

Sat 15 Nov . Mount Moliagul excursion. Leave outside 27 Doveton St. at 11.00 am. Take lunch and afternoon tea. There will be a walk of about 2 km to the peak of Mt Moliagul.

Thurs 27 Nov. Business meeting. 38 Campbell St at 7.30 pm.

Fri 12 Dec. Members and visitors' night. You are invited to contribute a segment of the program. Give a short (5 or 10 minutes) talk, or show some slides (about a dozen), or bring specimens, or discuss some other aspect of natural history. Please bring some supper too.

Sat 13 Dec. Excursion to Tullaroop Reservoir. Time to be decided at December meeting. Depending on the temperature, it may be early or late afternoon. Meeting place is CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St.

Sat 10 Jan. Dawn Breakfast. Greet the dawn, and the dawn birds while breakfasting in the great outdoors. Meet at 15 Gaulton Street at 5.30 am. Bring binoculars, bird book and breakfast. Leader is M Oliver.

Fri 13 Feb. Annual meeting. Program to be arranged.

Fri 6 Mar - Mon 9 Mar. VFNCA campout at Marysville. Details were printed in the October newsletter.

Fri 11 Sept-Sun 13 Sept. Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.

Fri 16-Sun 18 Oct. Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association campout at Mildura.

Meetings: General meetings are held on the second Friday every month (except Jan) at the Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm. The entrance to the car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Business meetings are held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated. No excursions are held on days of total fire ban.

Subscriptions 1997: Ordinary Membership: Single $16, Family $24; Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18; Supporting $25; Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc. P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.

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